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House Finance Committee
82 Smith St
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

I am writing as a member of the Kennedy Plaza Resilience Coalition, and am writing about the departmental budget for RIPTA: the draft FY2027 budget (H7127) and the revised FY2026 budget (H7126). I am calling for amendments to at least the FY2027 budget.

I am calling to AMEND the budget on (1) the line item for “RIPTA-Land and Buildings” that funds the unwanted Providence bus hub relocation and (2) RIPTA’s funding level.

The project of relocating the Providence bus hub is deeply harmful to our state’s public transit, and yet nevertheless the hub move is expected to be extraordinarily expensive (in December 2022 the RIPTA board’s Finance Committee was told it would probably cost \$200-250 million all told). Needless to say, RIPTA does not have the money to pay for that. It is likely that taxpayers will be stuck with much of the bill, for a project that does not even improve our state’s transit system and instead harms it.

Unlike most people who go to this committee to ask you for more money, I ask that you spend less money on this, preferably nothing at all.

There is no need to relocate the state’s central bus hub. It is already located at the site which is best for public transit, Kennedy Plaza. In fact, most of the 15,000 daily bus riders who go to Kennedy Plaza go there, not to transfer to a different bus, but because they actually want to go to locations in and next to Kennedy Plaza, as their final destination. If the hub was moved out of Kennedy Plaza, they could no longer get to the center of Providence in a single trip, and would instead have to change buses at a new hub just to take an extra bus ride to their destination. This is quite burdensome to people with disabilities, seniors, families and working Rhode Islanders.

Currently the proposed bus hub move is governed by an initial design contract, in which a vendor has been hired to take the proposed new hub project up to a state of 60% design. This initial contract can be terminated by RIPTA at any point, and it has a cost that’s capped at \$16.9 million (in contrast, if a second contract is signed to actually build the hub, the cost will be completely unconstrained and no one knows whether the \$200-250 million estimate will be adequate). But the initial design contract is easy to terminate, and if terminated early, RIPTA would not have to pay most of the \$16.9 million. This \$16.9 million contract is being funded out of money from a bond voters approved in 2014 for “enhancements and renovations of mass transit hub infrastructure throughout the state”. This is an inappropriate use of the bond money because the proposed bus hub move does is not an “enhancement” or “renovation”, nor has the bond money ever been used for hub infrastructure anywhere else “throughout the state”. The 2014 voters were led to believe that other parts of the state would benefit, and the bond language talks about funding access to “multiple intermodal sites”. But in actual, this bond money has been repeatedly poured into ill-conceived and harmful plans to move the Providence bus hub, with no benefit to people in Providence and nothing spent on projects elsewhere in the state, while bus riders have constantly been opposed. If the \$16.9 million is spent on this contract, the bond money will be nearly exhausted, and there will still be no end in site to the cost of this unwanted bus hub move.

For this reason, I ask you to eliminate the budget line item on “RIPTA-Land and Buildings” which authorizes using \$1.6 million of the bond money in FY2027 for this unwanted design contract. If this line item is cut, the

RIPTA board will have to exercise its option to terminate the initial design contract, saving the state a large wasteful expense. The bond money can then instead be used for actual enhancements and renovations in Kennedy Plaza and elsewhere, as voters originally intended, thus benefiting people throughout the state and helping to implement the Transit Master Plan that was approved by the state in 2020.

When Gov. McKee tries to use the bond money on the hub relocation, it gets **no matching funds** from the federal government or elsewhere – the state has to pay entirely on its own for the current contract, a contract for work that can only worsen Rhode Islanders’ well-being. But if the bond money was redirected away from this unwanted hub relocation to more productive purposes, it could get federal matching funds and the dollars would be multiplied. The current contract is now slated to be paid for using \$16.9 million in bond money, and most of that \$16.9 million is still unspent since the contract can be terminated at any time. Terminating this contract and directing the \$16.9 million into areas that get federal matching funds would provide tens of millions for the state.

I notice that the Governor’s proposed revised appropriations for FY2026, in this year’s H7126, have cut over half of the \$6.9 million in expenditures for the Providence hub relocation (“RIPTA-Land and Buildings”) that was contained in the FY2026 budget enacted last June – the revised FY2026 appropriations in this year’s H7126 reduce that expenditure of bond money from \$6.9 million to \$3.1 million. It is good that the expenditure in FY2026 on this unwanted hub relocation project is not going to be as large as the initially proposed \$6.9 million. But even the Governor’s current plan, spending \$3.1 million in FY2026 and \$1.6 million in FY2027, is still wasting millions of taxpayer money on an unwanted and unhelpful project. Zeroing out these amounts would save millions in bond money that could be redirected to far more productive purposes.

On a different subject, I ask you to fix the unreasonable treatment of RIPTA in Gov. McKee’s budget. In August 2025, without approval from the General Assembly, Gov. McKee redirected \$3 million from RIPTA’s capital budget to a program that had been intended to be funded by CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) and then moved the \$3 million in CMAQ funds to pay for RIPTA’s operating expenses – in effect, funding RIPTA’s FY2026 operating budget by raiding the RIPTA capital budget that is supposed to fund RIPTA’s future needs.¹ Although RIPTA needed operating funds, this way of doing it was fiscally irresponsible, and the operating funds should not have been taken out of RIPTA’s capital funding. In addition, Gov. McKee’s August 2025 plan relied on making up the gap in RIPTA’s operating budget in part through a fare increase in FY2027, without any evidence that a fare increase would even lead to any net increase in revenue (fare increases often decrease ridership and risk backfiring by reducing revenue, and in any case fares have always contributed only a small part of RIPTA’s revenue).² RIPTA remains in dire financial straits and Gov. McKee’s dubious one-time stopgaps are not the right approach. Even with these stopgaps, Gov. McKee’s low funding of RIPTA has already led to the largest RIPTA service cuts I’ve seen, in September 2025. Please add \$5 million to RIPTA’s budget, as provided in Rep. Alzate’s H8256. People in many parts of Rhode Island want better bus service, and funding RIPTA adequately would benefit residents and local businesses that would profit from increased mobility, while making progress toward climate goals more efficiently than single-person car travel does.

Sincerely,

Randall Rose

1 <https://files.constantcontact.com/95de6620601/c9b34c76-80d9-4b61-81e7-b653700cfb5d.pdf>

2 <https://files.constantcontact.com/95de6620601/c9b34c76-80d9-4b61-81e7-b653700cfb5d.pdf>